



by  
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in a World  
of Ferment

## THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN THE CHANGING SITUATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Part I: Latin American Youth in a World of Ferment –  
Rev. Murray Dickson

Part II: New Factors in the Expanding Urban Situation –  
Dr. Meryl Ruoss

Part III: The Indigenous Churches in Latin America –  
Dr. Eugene A. Nida

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# Latin American Youth in a World of Ferment

The ferment which is brewing in the world today needs to be examined with particular reference to its manifestations in Latin America. Although surely nothing new can be added, nevertheless it should be valuable for us to focus our attention on major aspects of this ferment, so that we can have this background present as we analyze the conditions and position of our youth in Latin America.

The ferment in Latin America is not primarily political, although all of us are aware of the important role politics has played throughout the history of Latin America. Its importance is largely negative in the sense that the continuing revolutions and struggles for power and prestige have served as real impediments to progress; have exchanged one group of exploiters for another and have been, in a sense, a luxury which these governments, much less the Latin American people, could ill afford. This is evidenced by the fact that after each revolution, the value of the money of the country involved has declined even further. But now the political turmoils in Latin America have become not only negatively important—as they have been primarily up to this point—but also positively significant in the sense that today such political conflicts are not primarily struggles for personal power, although certainly there is still much of that in them. Instead, today they are primarily ideological conflicts manifested in political contests. This means that what happens in politics is no longer simply an exchange of exploiters, but a struggle for fundamental direction of national life. Consequently, while politics is not the essence of the ferment in Latin America, certainly it is a significant and increasingly important manifestation of that ferment.

This ferment becomes more important in the economic life rather than in the political life. In last year's study, an effort

was made to point out that the situation in Latin America is not primarily one of underdevelopment but of uneven development. This fact is so important that we should always bear it in mind.

Throughout Latin America there is still a persistence of old economic patterns. Most of the countries still have one-crop economies, or two-crop economies, and many of them are primarily extractive economies. Sooner or later, they begin to operate on a sub-marginal level, which upon reaching exhaustion, causes real crisis. Land tenure problems are far from solved in Latin America as yet. Even radical land reforms—like the one undertaken in Mexico in 1917, the more far-reaching ones begun in Bolivia in 1955, the land reforms contemplated now in Cuba—have not been adequately developed to substitute increased production as well as increased possession of land. The old systems of production had 70 per cent of the population of Latin America engaged in agriculture, and still production of foodstuffs was not adequate to supply the people; in comparison with our less than 12 per cent in agriculture in America and an over-production of food. Together with these one-crop patterns new economies are developing on radically different bases—the type of thing which is happening in Brazil—the development of a capitalism which may adequately fit the description made by Karl Marx: a few people becoming tremendously wealthy, while the masses of the people become poorer and poorer. Karl Marx's exact description of this economic phenomenon—the capitalists becoming more wealthy, the increasing exploitation of the people, and the people falling into a state of ever-increasing misery—is certainly dramatically evident in Brazil. This situation has been augmented by the government's effort to lift itself by its own bootstraps, a deliberate program of planned inflation—on the thesis that the printing of money to produce sudden development of basic capital, could then be offset by increasing production to the level of the money in circulation, thus, automatically eliminating the inflation itself.

This is a spectacular theory, and it will be a great panacea for all economic problems if it works out. It is hoped that it will, for the sake of Brazil and all of Latin America. However, at the

present stage of development, in Brazil, certainly the situation gives cause for great alarm and serious concern. At the same time that Brasilia is developing in all its spectacular beauty in the midst of a vast expanse of thin red dirt and scrub brush, this huge incredible monument to man's ingenuity and capacity already has 100,000 people living within its boundaries and places roundabout. Conditions of misery are not too far advanced (as the city is not so old) but quite definitely along the lines of the squalor in Sao Paulo and Rio. The present situation is most horribly and adequately described in a recent book reviewed in Time Magazine—a book that cannot be read more than a few pages at a time, if the reader has any sensitivity at all, because it reveals the absolute bestiality to which humans can descend when they live in conditions such as those prevalent among the majority of the people living in the slum sections of Brazil.

In short, this is the situation in Brazil: the development of a real legitimate capitalism—according to the Marxian theory, of a few increasingly wealthy with increasingly abusive exploitation at the top, an increasing horde of desperately poor people at the bottom, and the middle class being eliminated by this process of controlled inflation. The same kind of development occurred in Venezuela before the revolution. In other places we find the development of a kind of socialistic society, in theory at least, like the one attempted in Uruguay, and toward which some progress has been made. There is so much social legislation that actually production in Uruguay is having difficulty in maintaining the social benefits which the law establishes—a social legislation so progressive that it becomes untenable. In Bolivia an effort is being made to develop a communal society, though not exactly Communitistic. All three of these types of activities are new manifestations of economic development; new efforts to redirect economic life in Latin America.

All of these developments are taking place on a very uneven basis, with the result that in Latin America as a whole, we still find an overall per capita income of under \$200 per year. This means that there is insufficient capital to produce basic goods or

to be able to produce new wealth. This is what Kubitschek meant when he addressed the American government a year ago. He insisted that unless a radically new far-reaching program—creative program—of capital investment was undertaken in Latin America to make it possible for Latin American to meet their own needs—that is, to develop bases of production, to establish a sufficient margin between production and consumption so that this margin could itself become creative capital—the situation in Latin America would deteriorate completely. Certainly there is evidence that we have been moving much too slowly in this direction, and that Kubitschek's prognostication has become quite true.

This economic inequality of development, this effort at reorganization of economic life in Latin America, not yet quite fulfilled in any country, produces with it serious and desperate human problems—problems of ill health. In many sections life expectancy is under forty years, as compared with sixty-nine years here. Even in spite of this continuing ill health, there is some improvement in health which is contributing to the incredible population explosion which produced 126 per cent net increase in population in 40 years, more rapid than anywhere else in the world. This kind of increase in population has produced the agglomeration in cities which is a universal characteristic, but which is aggravated in Latin America because there is no basic economy to sustain these cities. The agglomeration of people in cities in sub-human conditions of unadulterated misery creates not only foci of economic and physical disease, but more significantly, centers of social infection because of the total breakdown, the disintegration of all the old social controls, norms and mores which used to hold people together in their rural communities. Poor or well-off, in the rural communities people did have standards which they often did not follow, but which nevertheless they agreed upon as being right and wrong; and these served as a kind of orientation. This is no longer true for the people in the huge masses in the city. This is significant of the fundamental problem—more basic than the political, the economic or the human problem, yet a fruit of all of them and a contributor to all of them—the complete loss of meaning, the lack of direction, the lack of fundamental spiritual orientation which has taken place in Latin America.

All of us are aware that Latin America is no longer Roman Catholic. It is Roman Catholic in tradition and Roman Catholic in tragedy, but it is not Roman Catholic in practice. Even the Roman Church itself is well aware of that. That is why a third of all Catholic missionaries who leave the States go to Latin America, in contrast with only a fourth of all the Protestant missionaries that go to Latin America. These are statistics from the Ford Foundation Survey conducted by James G. Maddox a few years ago.

In "The Lay Apostle", published by the National Catholic Welfare Conference this year, a pamphlet which certainly all who are interested in Christian work in Latin America need to know, the Catholic Church states that only 33 per cent of the people in Latin America ever make their first communion—that is to say—ever actually affiliate with the church. They go on to state that in many sections, only 4 per cent of the men, and 10 per cent of the women, or less than this figure, participate in their Easter duties. Evidently they have the same problem we Protestants do in the States—that is, people who go to church once a year, and some who do not even do that. But the important point is that Latin America is no longer effectively Roman Catholic in any sense of the word. Most of us are aware of this, but are not aware of how completely even the Roman Church realizes this fact. This is of significance because it means that the people do not have anything to feel attached to; they have nothing to sustain them.

Furthermore, some of the idealistic efforts at reform in Latin America have also somewhat vanished. The "Aprista Movement" in Perú certainly was a movement of high caliber and high quality in its inception and conception and in much of its practice, but the Aprista Movement in Perú certainly has disintegrated and is no longer an effective force. It lost much of its moral caliber some time ago. It was not able to follow the position of Haya de la Torre a kind of saint in Marxist clothing who was moved by terrific compassion for the people. He produced shattering writing which became the basis for leftist thought, not only in Perú, but also in Bolivia and parts of Chile and Ecuador, and actually practiced his concern by devoting all of the income from his writ-

ing, an appreciable income, into actual social uplift, not waiting for the revolution to do it, but himself participating in slum life in Lima. This kind of idealism is now strangely lacking among many of the radicals even in Latin America. Instead, we have a sort of beatnik in Chile and his counterpart in almost every Latin American country—people who are at loose ends; young people with all the drive of youth desperate for an effort at expression, loosing themselves in the streets in all kinds of irresponsible and self-destructive activities. So it seems that the fundamental fact in Latin America is the breakdown of meaning, the loss of significance, the loss of sense of life, which seems to be almost universal in Latin America. This fact, of course, is not peculiar to Latin America; none of these conditions are. Instead, we would have to recognize that what is taking place is the most tremendous revolution in the history of mankind.

The Church of England, for instance, is not primarily a revolutionary body. This has not been its primary activity in life. Nevertheless in November 1960 appeared a church missionary society news letter by Max Warren entitled "Revolution Unlimited". In this news letter he convincingly develops the thesis—which I think all of us are aware of, but perhaps have not been able to put our fingers on so clearly—that all the world is in a fundamental soul-shaking, world-shaking revolution; that for the first time in the history of mankind, all of the cultures have disintegrated at the same moment. There have been times when one culture disintegrated, and then another, etc., but now all the cultures at once have disintegrated. All the centers of value have disappeared, all the old meanings and interpretations have disappeared, and people are desperate for meaning.

This shattering, world-wide revolution is not only a revolution against want; not only an effort to be free from disease and from fear, but as Warren points out, it is a special eagerness to be free from contempt. There are many reasons for this need. To accept people as individuals happens to be one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The recognition of the value of the human being, and certainly the spread of Christian missions has



contributed to this world-wide revolution against the principal heresy of Christianity—Marxism, Communism. Even so, the Church has fallen short in her task. This has brought the judgment of God upon the Church because it has not been completely true to its principles. This judgment of God upon the Church is at the same time an instrument of God in bringing about this world-wide revolution.

Warren goes on to point out the fact that this revolution is infinitely greater than Communism, because Communism is simply a small perversion of this revolution which attempts to ride the crest of the wave of it and use the revolution for its own ends—an effort which we greatly foment and encourage—by branding every manifestation of revolution as Communism, and giving to them this legitimate surge of people toward freedom from want, from fear, disease and contempt. Instead, says Warren, we should understand that this revolution requires a greater direction, and has greater significance than Communism can ever give it. The truth is that this should be clearly accepted as a responsibility of the Church and the Church should be at the vanguard of this revolution, instead of finding itself in the position of attempting to stand firm in the way of the tidal wave which would surely wash us overboard unless we adjust to the situation.

The ferment in Latin America is simply one area of this world-wide revolution, and we cannot understand the position of our youth in Latin America except in terms of this world-wide revolution which is particularly manifest in Latin America in the ways in which we know it. This very breakdown of meaning, this very disintegration of society is in itself a hopeful sign. I think it proves that God is still the ruler of the world. If we were able to continue to do the things we have done without paying for it, it would indicate that God had abdicated. The very fact of the desperate situation in which we are, indicates that God is still operating. It means that the degree to which the Church makes itself an instrument of this will of God, the Church will be used creatively. To the degree to which we will to do this, the Church will be margined. This is the choice before us in Latin America

—to become central in this process or to be margined by our refusal to accept our responsibility in it. God will work his way out, using us if we will be used by him, or in spite of us, if we will not be used by him. How far this is true is indicated by a little piece of poetry by a beatnik in the States who, I presume, could not be classified Christian by any stretch of the imagination, or any stretch of *our* imagination at any rate, though maybe by God's imagination it could be possible. Nevertheless, he points a finger at the world situation which I think Christians ought to look at. He says:

“Sometime in Eternity some guys show up and  
One of them shows up real late.  
He is a kind of a carpenter from some  
Square-type place like Galilee,  
And he starts wailin' and claimin' that  
He is hep to who made heaven and earth  
And that the cat who really laid it on us  
Is his dad.  
“‘You're hot,’ they tell him, and  
They cool him.  
They stretch him on the tree to cool.  
And everybody after that is always makin'  
Models of this tree with him hung up,  
And always croonin' his name  
And callin' him to come down and sit in  
On their combo.  
—Like he is the king cat who's got to  
Blow or they can't quite make it.  
Only, he don't come down from his tree.  
He just hang there on his tree lookin' real  
petered out, and real cool, an' also,  
According to a roundup of late world news  
From the usual unreliable sources—  
REAL DEAD!”

I think that beatnik has described the situation in Latin America in those few words, as he has described the situation pretty well around the world more adequately than most of us

could ever hope to describe it. This is the situation which Latin American youth faces. This is the job that the Church has—to face that kind of situation. These youth in Latin America are facing this kind of situation, people in their teens and twenties, many of them people who do not get an opportunity to become educated. Their principal activity besides earning a living is manifested in the syndicate; in organizations which are based on economic concern on the thesis that man is primarily, fundamentally, and ultimately an economic animal, and the whole orientation which they receive in the syndicate is on that basis. The syndicates or labor unions in Latin America, as all of us know, are not primarily labor unions as we know them in the United States, but are power pressure groups. Their morale, their thesis, their basis of operation is pressure of whatever kind is necessary to get whatever that group wants. The ultimate goal is not the good of society but the interest of the group. This is made dominant in the whole thinking and philosophy of those youth who find themselves caught up in the syndicate movement, who constitute the majority of the Latin American young people. Consequently, most of the Latin American young people are simply not being reached by the Christian doctrine—either by the Roman Church even with its efforts at organizing labor union groups itself—or by us, except very indirectly through those members who happen to be at the same time members of our church and who feel such a loyalty to the church they are willing to remain steadfast even when the labor union calls.

Aside from these people in the syndicate whom we are largely ignoring, there are also those sectors of the population of youth who are students. Among students all of the elements of despair which I have already indicated are particularly important. They create an especially strong impression in them, because this is the age of idealism—when people wish to express their ideals by action. They are impatient with the frustrations of human existence, basically idealistic in demanding a better world, and still believing that we can have a better world by simply demanding it and taking it. They do not yet comprehend all the long slow processes which are essential in any constructive social change, and believe any doctrine which offers them a world on a platter by

simply saying an abracadabra or waving a red flag or a white flag. These students are being used as tools, as pawns, by created interests—we are well aware of that. We have seen how students are used as shock troops, as political groups, whipped up into political parties, and how they are sent forth into the forefront of actual social conflicts. The leaders are not the ones who get killed in the riots; the students are the ones who get killed, and then they become martyrs. This process has a double factor: It gives additional prestige to the politicians who send them into this shock troop situation, and it also involves the student in a way far beyond anything that the church is doing in most cases, because this is an actual experiential involvement in ideology.

This means that the student who has actually gone out onto the streets and fought for an ideology ceases to analyze the ideology and instead gives blind loyalty to it. If he analyzes the ideology and finds it wanting, he will have analyzed out of existence one of the basic springs of his action; one of the most important things that ever happened to him, namely, feeling that he was important, that he was significant, that he mattered—because at the moment of the shock in the street, where combat takes place, he feels, “I am now living, now I matter, now this is important”, This feeling of importance is related to an ideology. This is why, not only Moscow, but also Rome use shock troops in any kind of situation that demands urgent solution. This is why Roman priests recently gathered up a whole truck load of students in a town in Bolivia and took them over to a Protestant school, menaced the Protestant school, and succeeded in getting these high school students emotionally involved (ideologically) in this action. They did not actually do any physical damage, nor actually frighten the people in the Protestant school, but this action did produce an emotional involvement on the part of the high school students. This important condition of the students, this eagerness for meaning is in part satisfied by the people who use the students in some kind of action which creates emotional involvement with the idea.

What is the position of the Evangelical in the face of all this? This requires further analysis than we have been able to

undertake. Nevertheless, let me just point out the problem which we have been attempting to establish.

What is the position of the Christian Church in the face of all this? How can we describe the position of the Christian youth in the face of all this? If we are realistic, we will have to take a rather sad view of our present stage of development in much of Latin America. Often, the Protestant youth are isolated from participation in this kind of, presumably, meaningful activity. They are encouraged not to participate in mob violence and similar activities. As a result they do not get this degree of emotional involvement which combating or conflicting forces achieve. Often, our young people are intimidated, and to tell the truth, many of them are inhibited. Our efforts at imposing moral standards certainly are desperately needed in Latin America. Nevertheless, they have misfired because of inadequate direction in youth in producing a kind of *santito*—inhibited to the point where he is unable to establish meaningful relationships with people in other areas of life in Latin America. This is a kind of a self-imposed isolation like sometimes happens on college campuses in the States among some religious groups who become isolated from the rest of reality. The truth of the matter is that some of the religious activity by some of our churches in Latin America has deliberately tended toward this position; has deliberately induced this situation. The result is that by and large, Protestant youth in Latin America have tended to be margined from this fundamental social conflict; from this terrific revolution which is taking place.

Thus, our problem is—this revolution is here whether we accept it or not. The Church of England recognizes that it is here; the Catholic Church recognizes that it is here; anybody who looks at the situation knows it is here. This revolution *is*. It can be good or bad, but it *is*. What is the position of the Protestant Church in the face of this revolution? This is the fundamental problem, for the position of youth depends upon the position of the Protestant Church in the face of this problem. Shall we encourage them to participate in it?

On one occasion in Bolivia, a number of people in a church were becoming leaders of syndicates. At the same time, land was being taken from a group of Indians, who came to town to see the authorities to get their land returned. The ecclesiastical authorities of their Protestant church said, "Get back to the country. You have nothing to do with this, our Kingdom is not of this world." These are two Protestant testimonies taking place at the same time in the same country. What is the position of the Protestant Church? Is there a position of the Protestant Church? What shall we encourage our people to do? Then, once we answer that question, other questions arise from it. What is the participation of youth in this situation? Should we have shock troops of youth—not necessarily to battle in the streets with *machetes* and sticks—but should we have shock troops of youth, highly disciplined, well-organized, thoroughly educated in their fundamental beliefs, to undertake far-reaching and significant infiltration of society like the lay apostles of the Catholic church are now beginning to do; like the Communists have long been doing? Should it be a function of the Church to develop troops of youth within the Church? How shall the Church educate its young people to understand the tenets of Christianity? This is the fundamental problem because other things seem of no consequence unless the young people know where they are going. This is easy for the Communists and easy for the Catholics because they have a guide all written out for this purpose. The doctrine is established, the doctrine is orthodox, and we Protestants by and large have encouraged people to explore, to investigate, to think, to maintain the open mind to the point that we have an annihilated commitment. Is it possible to be open-minded, and at the same time committed? And if so, how can we help our Protestant young people to be genuinely committed? What shall we give them as a basic training for this commitment? What is the fundamental theological orientation which our young people must have—and how can we give this to them? Because the truth is that we have largely neglected giving to our Protestant youth fundamental theological orientation to life.

Finally, how shall we teach our young people even if we do not feel that the Church itself should sponsor any type of cell or

shock troop sort of action—how can we teach our young people to live as Christians in this revolution? How do we handle the young person who, whether he wants to or not, is elected to be leader of the syndicate because he is the one person in the syndicate that the people trust most? How do we prepare him for this, so that as leader of the syndicate he makes a significant contribution? What can we do to orient our people to fundamental social processes, to an awareness of what is taking place and to an understanding of what the significant Protestant contribution is to this revolution?

These are the questions that need to be examined and answered in order to meet the urgency of the problem faced by our Protestant youth today.

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